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BALTIC FACTOR IN RUSSIA-FRANCE RELATIONS

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The article aims to identify the role of the Baltic factor in Russian-French relations. Despite the fact that the Baltic Sea region (BSR) no longer plays an important role in Russian-French bilateral relations, the authors attach significance to analysing the dynamics and changes of the BSR role in European politics in the post-Napoleonic period. The authors compare the Russian and the July Monarchies (1830—1848) in the context of the current Vienna system of international relations. The article describes the role of the 1830—1831 uprising in Poland, which was an event of particular importance. The monarchies of the two countries had to take into account new social phenomena, which were more pronounced in France. After the suppression of the uprising in the Polish part of the Russian Empire, Polish emigrants residing in France became the stumbling block to the development of Russian-French relations. The article explores the role of P. de Barante, Ambassador of France to Russia and describes France and Russia's trade and economic interests in the Baltic Sea region. The authors conclude that the specificity of Russian-French bilateral relations became more apparent during the First and Second World Wars. However, the Baltic factor has lost its relevance over time.

***Key words**:* Baltic, Baltic Sea region, Polish uprising of 1830, July Monarchy, Kronstadt, P. de Barante, Franco-Russian Treaty of Commerce and Navigation

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Introduction

After the Congress of Vienna, the Baltic question came to the fore in Russian-French relations. It concerned opportunities for strengthening the countries' positions in the region, a series of disagreements between Euro-

pean states, and the aspiration of Russia and France to gain a potential ally and unite against a common enemy. In the 19th century, the Baltic question took on a new significance. The germs of the Baltic question are found in the international relations of the post-Order period — the 16th/17th centuries — when the region became a platform for cooperation between different powers, including Russia. In the early 18th century, the Baltic question was considered in Russian-French relations in the maritime context. However, in the 19th century, the focus shifted to the Polish problem. Poland was always important for both Russia and France and the Polish question would often become an obstacle to the bilateral relations.

The Polish aspect of Russian-French relations

In 1807, under the Treaty of Tilsit, Napoleon I established the Duchy of Poland from territories ceded to Prussia and the Austrian Empire by the Second and Third Partitions of Poland. The Duchy, which became a French protectorate, existed until 1813, when the forces of the Sixth Coalition conquered it. The Congress of Vienna assigned most of the territory of the Duchy to Russia as an autonomous Kingdom of Poland.

The Polish question was reopened in 1830 when a revolutionary wave generated by the French revolution swept over Europe, leading to the anti-Russian uprising in Warsaw. The rebellion complicated the already tense French-Russian relations. Nicholas I was an avid opponent of the July Revolution. He considered Louis-Philippe I a usurper who had ‘stolen' the crown from the young grandson of Charles X, the duke of Bordeaux. Only after England, Austria, Prussia, and other European states had recognised the July monarchy, Nicholas I changed his position. At first, the Russian Emperor was inspired by the idea of an armed intervention in France to restore the rule of Charles X. Many French authors would stress in the national press that the Polish uprising had forestalled a war between Russia and France. The attention of Nicholas I was focused on Warsaw — without subduing the Poles, it would have been more than unwise to move west.

The Polish uprising also became a serious political problem for France — a country that traditionally supported Polish aspirations to regain national independence. Despite widespread anti-Russian and pro-Polish sentiment in the French society, Louis Philippe and his supporters — liberal Orleanists — had a clear understanding that France could have returned to the club of great powers only if it had abandoned its attempts at forced spreading of liberal ideas and revising the Vienna system. The position on the Polish uprising taken by King Louis-Philippe and his government headed by the banker Jacques Laffite was a consistent refusal to provide military support for Poles. The Polish question was closely connected to the territorial integrity interests of Austria, Prussia, and Russia. Having authorised a revision of the Vienna system in the Belgian case, European monarchs clearly understood that, in the case of Poland, securing peace in Europe would be impossible without

maintaining status quo. As the Russian scholar V. V. Degoev stresses, both Paris and London understood this too well to let the feeling of solidarity with Poles prevail over the feeling of realism [4, p. 216].

On March 13, 1831, Laffite's Ministry, which was closely connected to the French financial circles and sympathised with Poles, was replaced by the Ministry of Casimir Périer, who — in keeping with the King's intentions — refused even to discuss the military support for Poles. All this was greeted with enthusiasm by the Russian cabinet. As early as January 1831, the Ambassador of Russia to France, Corsican C. A. Pozzo di Borgo wrote, 'The current disposition of the government regarding the Polish affairs is the most that we can do. I have received all possible assurances that France will not intervene in the Polish questions on any pretext' (AVPRI 133/469/197/111). Stressing the moderation and cautiousness of Casimir Périer's government, the diplomat believed that 'a war will not begin during his tenure as Minister' (AVPRI 133/469/198/62).

The Polish appeals to the French government were heard. However, sympathies expressed were mere declarations. Paris understood that a military intervention to protect Poles was fraught with a major destabilisation in international relations and national affairs. As Pozzo di Borgo stressed, Louis-Philippe would have never intervened in the Polish crisis under any pretence (AVPRI 133/469/197/105, 107).

Polish patriots had close connections with their supporters in France. Various civic organisations and committees were established and attempts were made to raise funds to support the rebels. However, these endeavours were futile [1; 7].

Throughout the year 1831, the French were closely observing the course of warfare. The Polish question was becoming an important factor in domestic politics, which was not overlooked by the government. From the beginning of September, front pages were featuring coverage of the Polish events. On September 16, 1831 Paris newspapers announced the capture of Warsaw by the Russian forces and the defeat of the Poles. Anti-Russian rallies sweeping over the French capital required an intervention from the army. Pozzo di Borgo's associates insisted that he leave France but he decided to stay and his decision preserved the diplomatic relations between France and Russia. In that situation, the departure of the ambassador would have led to the severance of relations between the two countries. As a contemporary of the events in question stressed, only Pozzo di Borgo's moderation and shrewdness had saved the relations between the two states [11].

Louis-Philippe striving to strengthen and stabilise his regime refrained from a military intervention in the Polish affairs. However, France became the greatest target of Polish emigration. Most commoners — soldiers, peasants, servants — settled in Galicia and Prussia. The rest continued farther to the West — to Switzerland, Belgium, England, and predominantly France.

In the early 1830s, the central problem of bilateral relations was the Polish uprising and the French position on the issue. In the mid-1830s, the Polish emigrants in France became the most contentious issue. Polish emi-

grant organisations in France caused serious concerns and constant complaints from the Russian government. The Vice-chancellor, Count Nesselrode, accused the French government of supporting Polish emigrants, in particular, Prince Czartoryski.

At the same time, the French government was seriously concerned with the Poles staying in France. As early as November 1831, Casimir Périer's government, striving to remove the unruly Poles from the capital, issued a circulaire forbidding the Poles entrance to Paris. The Polish emigrants were lodged at first in two large and later several dozen smaller groups in provincial French towns, where the 'Polish depots' were created. Paris became home to the richest and, as a rule, most moderate emigrants [7].

Although the French tried to restrict the activities of the Polish emigrants by law, Russia considered these steps insufficient believing that France had made a mistake having offered asylum to the Poles. In a conversation with the ambassador of France to Russia in 1835—1841, Baron de Barante, Count Nesselrode emphasised that France had treated Russia with less amiability than Russia had France, since the French government had admitted the Poles, whereas the Emperor had never received nor listened to the Legitimists[1] and had always rejected all their proposals. Indeed, de Barante made several reports of such démarches by the Russian Emperor. In particular, on May 4, 1839, he informed the head of the government Louis-Mathieu Molé that Nicholas I had refused to receive the French Legitimist Paire carrying letters from duchess de Berry [6].

Overall, the cautious and moderate Polish policy of the French government was welcomed in Russia. In particular, on May 21, 1836, baron de Barante informed Louis-Adolphe Thiers — who had been appointed the head of the cabinet and Minister of Foreign Affairs on February 22 — that the Emperor had been satisfied with the measures taken by the French government to restrict organised Polish immigration. However, he never refrained from stressing his attitude to Poland and intimidating the Ambassador [6].

From his early years, Nicholas I, who learnt his hatred for the Poles from his instructress Englishwoman Miss Lyon, was very sensitive to all things Polish. De Barante wrote that Poland had been the Emperor's primary concern [10]. On September 8, 1836, the Ambassador described the feelings of Nicholas I as follows: 'It is not often that the winner bears such sheer malice and such arrogant contempt for the defeated'. The diplomat believed that the Emperor saw his mission in 'turning Poland into a Russian province and wiping out any trace of its national spirit… its language and religion'. According to the Ambassador, Nicholas would often say, 'It is a question of seven decades if there are no interruptions' [6].

De Barante himself was deeply impressed by the Poles living in Russia, their independent demeanour and open criticism of the Russian government's politics. In his *Notes sur la Russie,* he stressed the inner freedom of Poles, especially, women, who expressed their hatred for Russia freely and fearlessly [9].

[1] The Legitimists supported the rights of succession of the duke of Bordeaux.

Russia, France, and the Baltic region

During his unprecedented time in office, baron de Barante made interesting and important observations about Russia and its politics. Valuable information is found in his reports on Russia's position in the Baltic. The Ambassador used to accompany the Emperor, who admired all the things military, on manoeuvres in Krasnoye Selo and Kronstadt — Russia's outpost in the Baltic. Emperor Nicholas was very proud of the Russian navy. When he demonstrated the might of the navy to the Ambassador, the emperor never missed an opportunity to intimidate de Barante by showing his attitude to King Louis Philippe, whom the diplomat represented.

In mid-June 1836, the Ambassador was present at the inspection of twenty-six three-deck ships, which was also visited by the emperor and his family. Studying the list of ships, de Barante noticed an interesting detail — most ships had been named after Russian victories over the French. The Emperor watched the Ambassador carefully studying the list, came up to him, and said amiably, 'I think you still have troubles with reading Russian. Let me help you'. The ship with the proud name Berezina topped the list. Nicholas, trying to downplay the impression, appeased the Ambassador with the words, 'There are ships named *Austerlitz* and *Friedland*. Everyone is proud of memories of war glory. It is very simple'. 'This holds true for all nations', de Barante answered, 'we also regard our victories with reverence' [10].

Although the diplomat stressed an increase in the Russian Navy's potential, he did not regard it as a distressing symptom. He emphasised that the Russian Baltic fleet had been blocked by ice seven months a year and thus it had not posed a threat. Moreover, de Barante believed the personnel of the Russian Navy to be unprofessional since they were recruited from far corners of the Empire and had had no experience in navigation. He thought that the only purpose the Navy could have served was fast transportation of the Russian troops to Europe [10, pp. 335—336].

In 1845, the Baltic question assumed an economic dimension in Russian-French relations. Despite the complicated political relations between Russia and France, both countries were interested in bilateral trade. Russia exported agricultural produce to France — grain, flax, lard, flax seeds, sheep wool, hemp, wood, copper, and iron. France exported to Russia wine, champagne, salt, fruits, indigo dyes, silk, and gems. In 1827—1836, French annual imports from Russia accounted for 20 million francs and annual exports to Russia for 8 million francs. The bilateral trade flows increased significantly in the following years. In 1837—1846, French annual imports accounted for 35 million francs and exports to Russia for 13 million francs [8].

On June 19, 1845, the Russian government issued a decree introducing protective duties in favour of Russian vessels in the ports of the Baltic and the North Seas. Merchants of French Mediterranean cities did not welcome this initiative. In particular, *La Patrie* newspaper promoting the interests of French entrepreneurs called this decree absurd and interpreted it as an attack

against French commerce. The chambers of commerce of Rouen and Bordeaux claimed that the French marine commerce was in such a difficult situation that all complications in relations with Russia, despite their secondary significance, deserved undivided attention [12].

François Guizot, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, informed the *charge d'affaires* in France, N.D. Kiselev, that the decree had forced the French government to take similar measures and introduce protective duties for French vessels in the Mediterranean Sea. Kiselev protested but the French government introduced the duties nevertheless. However, Guizot agreed with Kiselev that the most reasonable way to overcome disagreements would be concluding a treaty of commerce between France and Russia.

At the end of February 1845, negotiations began. N.D. Kiselev represented Russia and baron de Barante represented France. The negotiations progressed very slowly, since neither party wanted to abolish the duties. In March 1846, after a meeting with the Ministers of Commerce and Finances, Guizot informed Kiselev that the French government deemed it impossible to abolish the relevant law, which had been adopted a year earlier. Guizot proposed establishing equal duties for vessels operating from the Baltic Sea and freezing the 1845 duties for vessels bound to or operating from the Black Sea. The negotiations almost collapsed, since Kiselev declared that, under the circumstances, there was no reason to continue. Finally, the Russian government rejected the French proposal to preserve differentiated duties for French and Russian vessels. However, Russia did acknowledge the principle of mutuality in navigation and customs procedures. Moreover, the Russian government agreed to the French proposal to establish different duties for the ports of the North and Baltic Seas, on the one hand, and the Mediterranean, Black, and Azov Seas, on the other. In August 1846, Kiselev received final instructions from his government and, on September 16, 1846, the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation was signed. It was ratified on October 20. The key principle of the Treaty was that the port of origin determined the regime in the port of destination. Moreover, the Treaty guaranteed full mutuality, i.e. identical regimes for manufacturers from the North and the mutual preservation of differentiated duties for manufacturers from the South. The Russian government also stressed that, if a commercial agreement between Russia and France was signed in the near future, the decree of June 19, 1846 on protective duties in favour of Russian vessels in the Baltic ports would be abrogated [5].

Conclusions

From that point, the relations between France and Russia started to improve. By a decree issued by Nicholas I on October 12, 1864, baron de Barante was awarded the Order of Alexander Nevsky for his contribution to the signing of the Russian-French Treaty of Commerce and Navigation [3].

Therefore, the Baltic factor was an important component in Russian-French relations in the first half of the 19th century. Though being a secon-

dary element, it always played an important role in finding solutions to common European problems, the Polish question as well as in developing economic and commercial relations between Russia and France. Although the Baltic factor remained significant (for instance, during both world wars, when Russia and France were allies and the region turned into a theatre of war), since the first half of the 19th century, it has never played such an important role. In the current Russian-French relations, it is a minor factor. Of crucial important is the general framework for cooperation between Russia and the European Union, which embraces the major Baltic region countries. Thus, the Baltic question as a key factor of Russian-French relations is a thing of the past.

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